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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ Fastest Broadband? Who? ~ 'Pixels' & Big Screen? ~ Get Stranded Offline?

-* Obama Bemoans "Diversions" *-
-* New Attack Bypasses AV Protection! *-
-* U.S. Struggles with Evolving Cyber Threat! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Another one of those long weeks, for numerous reasons. I had some more tests and doctor visits this week, and so far, things are not as bad as they could have been as far as my health is concerned. It seems that I did not suffer a minor heart attack, as a radiological exam showed no damage to my heart. Earlier blood tests had a few significant abnormal results, which can indicate heart attacks, but the echo cardiogram showed otherwise. My blood pressure is still high, so I'll have to be on some medication, and it was highly suggested that I change some dietary and other habits. That will take some work, but I guess it's something that I'll have to try to endure. And, more tests coming up to keep checking out what's going on, and what might have happened to me a couple of weeks ago. Not fun, but I guess that's just a fact of life when we get older.

So, all of that stuff took care of a lot of my "spare" time this week. Hopefully my time will be a little better manageable in the coming weeks because I'll be reducing my hours at one job, and returning for some part time hours at the golf course. I'll have to see how this goes, and I hope that I'll be able to manage both jobs and be less physically challenged for the summer. At least I'll be outside, enjoying some nice New England weather for awhile! And maybe, I'll get a chance to actually get in a round of golf once in awhile!

So, while I start to work on getting myself back on track medically, let's get back on track a little bit with another issue of A-ONE!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, another week has come and gone and again there aren't enough messages on the UseNet to put in a column. As a matter of fact, the 'best' thread is about Nolan Bushnell joining "the new Atari", cheese and french fries. Not stellar column fodder.

Our friend Fred Horvat emailed me about last week's column where I talked about everything in 'gopherspace' being available in one large archive file, telling me that OmniWeb, a browser for Apple's OS X, adding support for Gopher. Sounds like something that Atari would be doing if they were still in the computer market, don't it?

Yeah, I thought so.

Well, since there really isn't anything Atari-related going on, I want to talk about this "Times Square Bomber" guy.

Am I the only one left scratching my head over this guy? I mean, even the law of averages would seem to dictate that he'd be right at least a LITTLE. But he made the absolute wrong decision each time. Let's break it down...

He BOUGHT a vehicle to use as a car bomb? He BOUGHT one? Like bombing a busy Times Square and possibly killing dozens of people was acceptable but STEALING a car was just plain wrong?? Ohhhhhh-kay.

He got three cylinders of the most explosive stuff he could get without arousing suspicion (propane), but left the cylinders sealed in the back of the SUV.

He had 2 five gallon containers of gasoline in the central part of the car, but from what I can puzzle out, left them capped or at least had no spillage in the car.. gotta be neat, ya know.

He used two alarm clocks as a timer? Two? I have no idea what the advantage to this might be, but I'm guessing it was to try to keep this master spy from accidentally blowing himself up. Probably the only good call he made in the whole process.

He somehow used these timers to ignite a bunch of fire crackers in something akin to a coffee can in hopes of igniting the gasoline. We now know that this didn't work. Thankfully, the fire crackers just went off and alerted a nearby street vendor that something was strange.

And from what I can gather, he also tried to make it a 'fertilizer bomb' like the Oklahoma City bomb by having a sealed box of fertilizer in proximity. Well, that'll make a nasty bomb alright... IF you have the right kind of fertilizer mixed with something like diesel fuel or heating oil and have something to ignite it. But this poor boob didn't do any of that right. My understanding is that he had the wrong fertilizer (what he had won't explode or burn or ignite no matter what), had it 'pristine'... nothing added to it to make it a bomb... and had it sealed in a box so that it was very unlikely that anything would go 'boom' regardless.

Now I've got no experience as a terrorist or bomber whatsoever, but I can come up with at least half a dozen things that this guy could have done to increase his chances of 'success'. Don't get me wrong, I'm incredibly grateful that he failed, but it boggles my mind that even an average person... and this guy DID seem to be at least average... could make so many mistakes. And he may not be an Einstein, but he didn't seem to be a dribbling idiot either.

So once he set the plan in motion, he left the SUV running, the hazard lights flashing, and activated his "bomb". He walked away and headed for his 'getaway car', but guess what, friends and neighbors, he left his keys

in the trunk lock of the SUV so he had to take the train home. Yeah, James Bond had better watch his step... there's a new kid in town, and heeeeee's packin'.

I don't know. Maybe the guy just wanted to prove to his wife that he was a tough guy... a freedom fighter... a manly man. Well, I don't know what the Arab equivalent of Walter Mitty would be, but I think this guy comes close. Maybe he wanted to make a splash. Maybe he wanted his wife to be sorry she'd gone back home to Pakistan, maybe he wanted to make her proud of him. Maybe he figured she'd be sorry when he was gone... if he'd figured that he was going to be caught and either killed or incarcerated.. a 'martyr to the cause'.

Who knows? But none of this makes sense to me. I'm not saying that they guy was a patsy, that he had nothing to do with it, or that he was led into it by someone who wanted him to do as bad a job as possible, but things just don't click, ya know? I mean, it's like a joke. "Did you hear the one about the guy who said he wanted to plot to blow up Times Square so badly? That's exactly how he plotted it... soooo badly."

I've also heard people make much of the fact that, once caught, he hasn't stopped talking. Now, I don't know exactly what that means. It could mean that he's telling authorities about every step he'd taken, or it could mean that he's making up stories about actually being trained by the Taliban in Pakistan when in fact he didn't "make the cut" in the first place. Or it could be that he's giving the authorities actual names and places and dates. There seems to be some hubbub about people sending him money to finance things... although I fail to see how much money it would be.. 10 gallons of gasoline, 3 cylinders of propane, some garden fertilizer, some commercial firecrackers and a used vehicle from Craigslist. Hardly high finance, even if you factor in his living expenses.

I guess my problem is that I can't figure out how someone who isn't a complete idiot could make so many bad decisions, make so many missteps... I mean, even with no training, wouldn't you think that it would occur to someone that an OPEN propane cylinder would be a better bet for explosion than a closed one? That gasoline all over the inside of a vehicle would be a better choice for starting a fire and/or explosion than gasoline neatly sealed in two five gallon jugs? That's the kind of thing that mystifies me.

Well, just add it to the list, I guess. There are plenty of things that mystify me these days. I'll tell you about some more of them next week if you come back.

So let's meet up next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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The video game industry has weathered the economic slowdown better than most industries, but there could be a reason - free games with new figures showing up to a third of gamers don't pay to play.

New research from video game tracking firm Newzoo found every existing video game platform from mobile to console has an audience of at least 30 percent of non-paying players.

"The platforms offering free-to play-gaming options like massively multiplayer online (MMO) games, mobile games and casual game portals are successfully converting players to payers."

"Our belief is that by allowing customers to experience our games for free it's a good way to guarantee customer satisfaction, as they have been able to play the game pre-purchase with the promise of lots more fun to come," said Paul Breslin, general manager, Popcap.com.

The U.S. currently leads the world in online business revenues, but Warman believes the EU and other territories will continue to grow gaming revenue in this arena moving forward.

"These free options are definitely broadening the appeal of video games among older and female demographics, and a lot of these consumers don't actually consider themselves gamers at all," Michael Cai, vice president

of video game research, Interpret.

"Without casual gaming portals like Pogo, Real Networks, and Big Fish Games, many older female gamers would have never paid for gaming content."

Interpret discovered that 21 percent of the U.S. population, or over 46.1 million Americans, play social network games. Over 11 million Americans only play social network games. The median age for social network gamers is 38.8, versus 30.9, which is the median age of console gamers.

Cai found that 12 percent of these social network gamers plan on buying a Wii, which would be their first game console.

More console game makers are offering consumers free play, including downloadable game demos through Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade and Sony's PlayStation Network Store. "Handing over free content to gamers can be tremendously beneficial to developers and publishers, even if it comes in the form of a short playable demo of a game that's not spectacular," said Patrick Shaw, features editor, GamePro Magazine.

"Often times a small taste of a game is all it takes to entice the player to purchase the full game."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -          Online Users Growl & Purr!
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This Day in History: The Atari Lynx Launches

On this day in 1990, Atari announced the official launch of the Lynx, the company's first and only portable console.

Though the console had been test marketed in "select retail outlets" going back to the previous holiday season, May 7 is the day it officially became available nationwide.

At the time, Atari was struggling to sell its 7800 console and, believe it or not, was still marketing the Atari 2600, which was over 12 years old at that point. Both were marketed as low-cost alternatives to the Nintendo Entertainment System, but judging by the company's financial reports that year, consumers weren't biting.

Atari's fiscal 1989 revenue of \$1.5 million was less than half of the \$3.3 million generated in fiscal 1988. The decline was specifically blamed on the aged home consoles.

The Lynx, featuring the first full-color screen in any portable game console, was meant to make Atari a home videogame superpower once more. Its thunder was stolen by Nintendo's Game Boy which, despite its technically inferior hardware, had more games and was in more stores that Christmas.

In the end, Atari managed to sell fewer than 500,000 Lynx consoles before giving up in 1994. By comparison, Nintendo sold 118,700,000 Game Boys during its lifetime, or 237 for every one Lynx.

The original press release announcing the Lynx's national launch is reproduced below.

ATARI LINKS UP NATION WITH HANDHELD LYNX VIDEO GAME SYSTEM

SUNNYVALE, Calif., May 7 /PRNewswire/ - Atari has announced the national availability of Lynx, the world's first color handheld video entertainment system, previously sold only in select retail outlets.

Slightly larger than a videocassette, the 1-pound Lynx took the home entertainment industry by storm last holiday season with its full-color, high-definition graphics, fast action and four-channel sound effects that put the excitement of video arcade games in the palms of players' hands.

Lynx is the first game of its kind that allows more than two players to compete simultaneously. Featuring ComLynx cables, Lynx can connect up to eight players, depending on the software.

This spring, Atari makes another breakthrough with the introduction of a new game card for Lynx, entitled "Gauntlet the Third Encounter," the first-ever four-player game for a handheld video system. Similar to the popular arcade version, the multi-player adventure game is available in retail and department stores where Lynx is sold.

Ideal for summer vacations and family road trips, the portable Lynx features a 3.5-inch color LCD screen with backlighting, which not only reduces eye strain, but also enables players to use Lynx anywhere - from outdoors to the back seat of a car at night.

Priced at \$179.99, every Lynx includes an AC adaptor, a ComLynx cable and "California Games," an action-packed game that lets players control the movement of a surfer, skateboarder, BMX rider and foot bag juggler.

Other game titles available for Lynx include "Blue Lightning," "Electrocop," "Gates of Zendocon" and "Chip's Challenge." Each game retails from \$34.99 to \$39.99.

In addition, a Lynx carrying case and car cigarette lighter adaptor will be available by early June.

Atari is a registered trademark and Lynx and ComLynx are trademarks of Atari Corp. Other products are trademarks of their manufacturers.

Adam Sandler Taking "Pixels" to Big Screen

"Pixels," the much-buzzed-about short film featuring 1980s video game characters attacking New York City, is heading for the big-screen.

The French filmmaker behind "Pixels," Patrick Jean, has teamed up with Adam Sandler's production banner Happy Madison to develop a big-screen take. The team is in talks with Columbia, where Happy Madison has its

first-look deal, to set up the project at the studio.

The project is still in the early stages and no writer is on board, but the plan is to make a "Ghostbusters"-style action comedy in which characters come out of a video game to wreak havoc in the real world.

"Pixels," abetted by a thumbs-up from filmmaker Edgar Wright, became a viral hit in April with its pixilated versions of Tetris, Space Invaders, Frogger, Pac-Man and others invading NYC first, then the world.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Obama Bemoans 'Diversions' of iPod, Xbox Era

US President Barack Obama lamented Sunday that in the iPad and Xbox era, information had become a diversion that was imposing new strains on democracy, in his latest critique of modern media.

Obama, who often chides journalists and cable news outlets for obsessing with political horse race coverage rather than serious issues, told a class of graduating university students that education was the key to progress.

"You're coming of age in a 24/7 media environment that bombards us with all kinds of content and exposes us to all kinds of arguments, some of which don't always rank all that high on the truth meter," Obama said at Hampton University, Virginia.

"With iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations, - none of which I know how to work - information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation," Obama said.

He bemoaned the fact that "some of the craziest claims can quickly claim traction," in the clamor of certain blogs and talk radio outlets.

"All of this is not only putting new pressures on you, it is putting new pressures on our country and on our democracy."

Obama, who uses the handful of Commencement addresses that he delivers each year to meditate on societal developments broader than the minutiae of everyday politics, warned the world was at a moment of "breathtaking change."

"We can't stop these changes... but we can adapt to them," Obama said, adding that US workers were in a battle with well-educated foreign workers.

"Education... can fortify you, as it did earlier generations, to meet the tests of your own time," he said.

Hampton University is a historically black college, and Obama noted the huge disparity in educational achievement between African Americans and other racial groups in the United States and the world.

But he urged the graduates to take inspiration from the example of Dorothy Height, a civil and women's rights icon who died, aged 98, last month, who fought racial prejudice to secure a college education.

"A black woman, in 1929, refusing to be denied her dream of a college education," Obama said, reprising Height's life story.

"Refusing to be denied her rights, refusing to be denied her dignity, refusing to be denied... her piece of America's promise."

Obama argued that from the days of the pioneer politicians who founded the United States, until the modern day, education and knowledge had been the key to progress and US democracy.

He drew a line between Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, and today's challenges.

"What Jefferson recognized... that in the long run, their improbable experiment - called America - wouldn't work if its citizens were uninformed, if its citizens were apathetic, if its citizens checked out, and left democracy to those who didn't have the best interests of all the people at heart.

"It could only work if each of us stayed informed and engaged, if we held our government accountable, if we fulfilled the obligations of citizenship."

White House: Obama Was Joking About iPod, iPad

This past Sunday, President Obama delivered a commencement speech to the graduating class at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia; during which he mentioned popular consumer electronics and their potential effect on digital media.

The statement that caught our eye and others in the digital media was as follows:

"And meanwhile, you're coming of age in a 24/7 media environment that bombards us with all kinds of content and exposes us to all kinds of arguments, some of which don't always rank that high on the truth meter. And with iPods and iPads; and Xboxes and PlayStations - none of which I know how to work - (laughter) - information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation. So all of this is not only putting pressure on you; it's putting new pressure on our country and on our democracy." (The full transcript can be found on whitehouse.gov, while the video is available on YouTube.)

By themselves, the President's comments seem ambiguous and could hint that he's interest in adding more government regulation to the Internet which is currently being played out in Washington. The FCC is considering re-classifying broadband Internet connections; a move that has not been

made without criticism.

Also, it leaves the door open to wonder if he truly didn't know how to use those products; especially since President Obama has conveyed a tech-savvy image which stemmed way back to the beginning of his campaign for President. Some of the most buzz worthy stories include one from 2008 in which he shared his iPod playlist with Billboard Magazine and in 2009 he fought to become the first president to be permitted to carry a BlackBerry. His tech-conscious image was a particularly stark contrast from his 72-year-old opponent, John McCain, who admitted he was technically inept by making comments like "I don't e-mail. I've never felt the particular need to e-mail."

Our editor-in-chief, Lance Ulanoff, reached out to the White House for a comment; they responded yesterday evening with the following:

"While the President joked that his level of tech savvy was wanting, his point was that technology offers this generation limitless opportunities and it is up to the individual if they will use these advancements simply for entertainment or as tools of empowerment that, when combined with their educations, will keep America at the forefront of technological advancement in the 21st century," Moira Mack, a White House spokesperson, said.

The comment was a bit too late. Many media outlets took Obama's original comments and ran some of the following headlines, such as Fox News's story: "Tech-Savvy Obama Now Says He Doesn't Know How to Use an iPod," and The New York Post's story, " iPad is iBad for democracy, Obama tells graduates".

Not all stories focused on the President's tech inexperience; cable news star Bill O'Reilly weighed in, stating, "President Obama and me both agree that high-tech gizmos could hurt the country."

U.S. Struggles To Ward Off Evolving Cyber Threat

The United States is losing enough data in cyber attacks to fill the Library of Congress many times over, and authorities have failed to stay ahead of the threat, a U.S. defense official said on Wednesday.

More than 100 foreign spy agencies were working to gain access to U.S. computer systems, as were criminal organizations, said James Miller, principal deputy under secretary of defense for policy.

Terrorist groups also had cyber attack capabilities.

"Our systems are probed thousands of times a day and scanned millions of times a day," Miller told a forum sponsored by Ogilvy Washington, a public relations company.

He said the evolving cyber threat had "outpaced our ability to defend against it."

"We are experiencing damaging penetrations - damaging in the sense of loss of information. And we don't fully understand our vulnerabilities," Miller said.

His comments came as the Obama administration develops a national strategy to secure U.S. digital networks and the Pentagon stands up a new military command for cyber warfare capable of both offensive and defensive operations.

The Senate last week confirmed National Security Agency Director Keith Alexander to lead the new U.S. Cyber Command, which will be located at Ft. Meade, Maryland, the NSA's headquarters.

Miller suggested the new organization, which is expected to be fully operational in October, had its work cut out for it.

Among its challenges are determining what within the spectrum of cyber attacks could constitute an act of war.

Miller said the U.S. government also needed to bolster ties with private industry, given potential vulnerabilities to critical U.S. infrastructure, like power grids and financial markets.

Hackers have already penetrated the U.S. electrical grid and have stolen intellectual property, corporate secrets and money, according to the FBI's cybercrime unit. In one incident, a bank lost \$10 million in cash in a day.

"The scale of compromise, including the loss of sensitive and unclassified data, is staggering," Miller said. "We're talking about terabytes of data, equivalent to multiple libraries of Congress."

The Library of Congress is the world's largest library, archiving millions of books, photographs, maps and recordings.

U.S. officials have previously said many attempts to penetrate its networks appear to come from China.

Google announced in January that it, along with more than 20 other companies, had suffered hacking attacks that were traced to China. Google cited those attacks and censorship concerns in its decision to move its Chinese-language search service from mainland China to Hong Kong.

Miller took an example from the Cold War playbook to explain how the United States military would need to prepare for fallout from a cyber attack, which could leave cities in the dark or disrupt communications.

In the 1980s, the Pentagon concluded that the military needed to prepare to operate in an environment contaminated by the use of weapons of mass destruction.

"We have a similar situation in this case. We need to plan to operate in an environment in which our networks have been penetrated and there is some degradation," he said.

One of the challenges Miller singled out was the development of enough U.S. computer programmers in the future.

"In the next 20 to 30 years, other countries including China and India will produce many more computer scientists than we will," he said. "We need to figure out how to not only recognize these trends but take advantage of them."

New Attack Bypasses Virtually All AV Protection

Bait, switch, exploit!

Researchers say they've devised a way to bypass protections built in to dozens of the most popular desktop anti-virus products, including those offered by McAfee, Trend Micro, AVG, and BitDefender.

The method, developed by software security researchers at matousec.com, works by exploiting the driver hooks the anti-virus programs bury deep inside the Windows operating system. In essence, it works by sending them a sample of benign code that passes their security checks and then, before it's executed, swaps it out with a malicious payload.

The exploit has to be timed just right so the benign code isn't switched too soon or too late. But for systems running on multicore processors, matousec's "argument-switch" attack is fairly reliable because one thread is often unable to keep track of other simultaneously running threads. As a result, the vast majority of malware protection offered for Windows PCs can be tricked into allowing malicious code that under normal conditions would be blocked.

All that's required is that the AV software use SSDT, or System Service Descriptor Table, hooks to modify parts of the OS kernel.

"We have performed tests with [most of] today's Windows desktop security products," the researchers wrote. "The results can be summarized in one sentence: If a product uses SSDT hooks or other kind of kernel mode hooks on similar level to implement security features it is vulnerable. In other words, 100% of the tested products were found vulnerable."

The researchers listed 34 products that they said were susceptible to the attack, but the list was limited by the amount of time they had for testing. "Otherwise, the list would be endless," they said.

The technique works even when Windows is running under an account with limited privileges.

Still, the exploit has its limitations. It requires a large amount of code to be loaded onto the targeted machine, making it impractical for shellcode-based attacks or attacks that rely on speed and stealth. It can also be carried out only when an attacker already has the ability to run a binary on the targeted PC.

Still, the technique might be combined with an exploit of another piece of software, say, a vulnerable version of Adobe Reader or Oracle's Java Virtual Machine to install malware without arousing the suspicion of the any AV software the victim was using.

"Realistic scenario: someone uses McAfee or another affected product to secure their desktops," H D Moore, CSO and Chief Architect of the Metasploit project, told /The Register/ in an instant message. "A malware developer abuses this race condition to bypass the system call hooks, allowing the malware to install itself and remove McAfee. In that case, all of the 'protection' offered by the product is basically moot."

A user without administrative rights could also use the attack to kill an installed and running AV, even though only admin accounts should be

able to do this, Charlie Miller, principal security analyst at Independent Security Evaluators, said.

How An Unfixed Net Glitch Could Strand You Offline

In 1998, a hacker told Congress that he could bring down the Internet in 30 minutes by exploiting a certain flaw that sometimes caused online outages by misdirecting data. In 2003, the Bush administration concluded that fixing this flaw was in the nation's "vital interest."

Fast forward to 2010, and very little has happened to improve the situation. The flaw still causes outages every year. Although most of the outages are innocent and fixed quickly, the problem still could be exploited by a hacker to spy on data traffic or take down websites. Meanwhile, our reliance on the Internet has only increased. The next outage, accidental or malicious, could disrupt businesses, the government or anyone who needs the Internet to run normally.

The outages are caused by the somewhat haphazard way that traffic is passed between companies that carry Internet data. The outages are called "hijackings," even though most of them are not caused by criminals bent on destruction. Instead the outages are a problem borne out of the open nature of the Internet, a quality that also has stimulated the Net's dazzling growth.

"It's ugly when you look under the cover," says Earl Zmijewski, a general manager at Renesys Corp., which tracks the performance of Internet data routes. "It amazes me every day when I get into work and find it's working."

When you send an e-mail, view a Web page or do anything else online, the information you read and transmit is handed from one carrier of Internet data to another, sometimes in a long chain. When you log into Facebook, your data might be handed from your Internet service provider to a company such as Level 3 Communications Inc., which operates a global network of fiber-optic lines that carry Internet data across long distances. It, in turn, might pass the data to a carrier that's connected directly to Facebook's server computers.

The crux of the problem is that each carrier along the way figures out how to route the data based only on what the surrounding carriers in the chain say, rather than by looking at the whole path. It's as if a driver had to get from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh without a map, navigating solely by traffic signs he encountered along the way - but the signs weren't put up by a central authority. If a sign pointed in the wrong direction, that driver would get lost.

That's essentially what happens when an Internet route gets hijacked. Because carriers pass information between themselves about where data should go - and this system has no secure, automatic means of verifying that the routing information is correct - data can be routed to some carrier that isn't expecting the information. The carrier doesn't know what to do with it, and usually just drops it. It falls into a "black hole."

On April 25, 1997, millions of people in North America lost access to all of the Internet for about an hour. The hijacking was caused by an

employee misprogramming a router, a computer that directs data traffic, at a small Internet service provider.

A similar incident happened elsewhere the next year, and the one after that. Routing errors also blocked Internet access in different parts of the world, often for millions of people, in 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2009. Last month a Chinese Internet service provider halted access from around the world to a vast number of sites, including Dell.com and CNN.com, for about 20 minutes.

In 2008, Pakistan Telecom tried to comply with a government order to prevent access to YouTube from the country and intentionally "black-holed" requests for YouTube videos from Pakistani Internet users. But it also accidentally told the international carrier upstream from it that "I'm the best route to YouTube, so send all YouTube traffic to me." The upstream carrier accepted the routing message, and passed it along to other carriers across the world, which started sending all requests for YouTube videos to Pakistan Telecom. Soon, even Internet users in the U.S. were deprived of videos of singing cats and skateboarding dogs for a few hours.

In 2004, the flaw was put to malicious use when someone got a computer in Malaysia to tell Internet service providers that it was part of Yahoo Inc. A flood of spam was sent out, appearing to come from Yahoo.

"Hijacking is very much like identity theft. Someone in the world claims to be you," said Todd Underwood, who worked for Renesys during the Pakistan Telecom hijacking. He now works for Google Inc., trying to prevent hijacking of its websites, which include YouTube.

In 2003, the Bush administration's Critical Infrastructure Protection Board assembled a "National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace" that concluded that it was vital to fix the routing system and make sure the "traffic signs" always point in the right direction.

But unlike Internet bugs that get discovered and fixed relatively quickly, the routing system has been unreformed for more than a decade. And while there's some progress being made, there's little industry-wide momentum behind efforts to introduce a permanent remedy. Data carriers regard the fallibility of the routing system as the price to be paid for the Internet's open, flexible structure. The simplicity of the routing system makes it easy for service providers to connect, a quality that has probably helped the explosive growth of the Internet.

That growth has also increased the risks exponentially. Fifteen years ago, maybe 8,000 people in the world had access to computers that use the Border Gateway Protocol, or BGP, which defines how carriers pass routing information to each other. Now, Danny McPherson, chief security officer at Arbor Networks, believes that with the growth of Internet access across the world and the attendant increase in the number of carriers, that figure is probably closer to 1 million people.

Peiter Zatko, a member of the "hacker think tank" called the L0pht, told Congress in 1998 that he could use the BGP vulnerability to bring down the Internet in half an hour. In recent years, Zatko - who now works for the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency - has said the exploit would still work. However, it would likely take a few hours rather than 30 minutes, partly because a greater number of Internet carriers would need to be hit.

Plenty of solutions have been proposed in the Internet engineering community, going back as far as 1995. The U.S. government has supported these efforts, spurred in part by the Bush administration's 2003 strategy statement. That has resulted in some trials of new technology, but adoption by data carriers still appears distant. And the federal government doesn't have any direct authority to force changes.

One reason is that the weaknesses in the system are in the routing between carriers. It doesn't help if one carrier introduces a new system every one it connects with has to make the change as well.

"It's kind of everybody's problem, because it impacts the stability of the Internet, but at the same time it's nobody's problem because nobody owns it," says Doug Maughan, who deals with the issue at the Department of Homeland Security.

The big Internet carriers seem willing to accept the status quo. Spokesmen at AT&T Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc., two of the largest, world-spanning carriers of Internet traffic, said they were unable to find anyone at their companies who could discuss the issue of routing reform.

Pieter Poll, the chief technology officer at Qwest Communications International Inc., says that he would support some simple mechanisms to validate data routes, but he argues that fundamental reform isn't necessary. Hijackings are typically corrected quickly enough that they don't pose a major threat, he argues.

One fix being tested would stop short of making the routing system fully secure but would at least verify part of it. Yet this system also worries carriers because they would have to work through a central database.

"My fear is that innovation on the Internet would slow down if there's a need to go through a central authority," Poll says. "I see little appetite for that in the industry."

Jeffrey Hunker, a former senior director for critical infrastructure in the Clinton administration, says he's not surprised that little has happened on the issue since 2003. He doesn't expect much to happen in the next seven years, either.

"The only thing that's going to drive adoption is a major incident, which we haven't had yet," he says. "But there's plenty of evidence out there that a major incident would be possible."

In the meantime, network administrators deal with hijacking an old-fashioned way: calling their counterparts close to where the hijacking is happening to get them to manually change data routes. Because e-mails may not arrive if a route has been hijacked, the phone is a more reliable option, says Tom Daly, chief technical officer of Dynamic Network Services Inc., which provides Web hosting and other Internet services.

"You make some phone calls and hope and pray," Daly says. "That's about it."

With so many people counting on their investments and 401(k)s for retirement, it's frightening how just one technical glitch can bring everything tumbling down.

According to market analysts, Thursday's stock market free-fall may have been triggered by human error. A trader for Citigroup, the nation's third-ranked bank company, reportedly hit 'B' for 'billion' in a trade instead of 'M' for million. At time of press, Citi claimed it had no proof of the bad trade, but an investigation has been launched.

After what appeared to be a massive sell-off by the bank, the market tumbled further - but it happened automatically. A series of program-driven trades kicked in as soon as the initial drop hit. From there, the program trading continued as trigger point after trigger point was reached.

But officials at the New York Stock Exchange insist the technical glitch can't be solely blamed for the catastrophe. Spokesman Ray Pellecchia said that NYSE has a 'speed bump' program built in to it that slows down trades if there are inexplicable drops in stock prices. The system then determines whether or not a trading error snowballed into something bigger.

Pellecchia also noted that while this 'speed bump' kicks in, traders can still go to other markets to sell - and that's exactly what happened.

Whether the blame is ultimately placed on the technical system itself or worried traders, one thing's still clear: It wasn't a good day for investments.

The Dow Jones industrial average lost 6% of its value in mere minutes, though it recovered to a loss of 346.51 points (3.2%) at the market's close. All told, the drop cost the market more than \$500 billion (yes, 'B' as in 'billion').

Mozilla Outlines Plans for Firefox 4 To Overtake Chrome

Mozilla gave developers a heads-up Monday on its plans to release a new version of Firefox featuring advanced HTML5 capabilities. Reacting to the recent market-share success of Google's lightning-fast Chrome browser, Mozilla said one of the priorities for its forthcoming Firefox 4 release is to make the next-generation browser "super-duper fast."

With Firefox 4, the ultimate aim for Mozilla is to develop a technology base that is fast, secure and optimized, noted Firefox Director Mike Beltzner. "For users, we want to build a product that is fast, friendly and empowering," Beltzner told the Mozilla developer community on Monday. "For developers, we want to give them tools for capable, fast Web access."

However, it's not just the next version of Firefox that needs to be fast. The Firefox development team needs to hustle because Chrome growth in the global browser market has been outpacing all its rivals for the past several months.

According to the latest data from Net Applications, Chrome increased its market share to 6.7 percent in April - which is about five percentage

points higher than it was a year ago. Moreover, Google Chrome has been the major beneficiary of Microsoft's weakness in the browser market over the course of the past 12 months, a role that Firefox used to enjoy.

The global market share held by Internet Explorer hit a 12-month low of 59.95 percent at the end of April, and over that period Chrome received the lion's share of Microsoft's percentage slide. Meanwhile, Mozilla's share of the browser market in April continued to hover at 23.8 percent, up only slightly from April 2009.

Beltzner hopes the addition of advanced capabilities to Firefox 4 like HTML5, 64-bit computing support, and reduced I/O operations on the main thread will help. However, none of these advancements will do anything to help Mozilla counter one of Chrome's major strengths apart from sheer speed - the advertising and web-promotion power of Google.

With Firefox 4, the product's development team aims to deliver a sleeker and simpler user interface as the default, performance optimizations, and faster navigation. To speed things along for users, Firefox 4 will add dedicated application tabs. Users also will be able to install add-ons without having to restart the browser.

Mozilla's plan right now is to have Firefox 4 available in a beta release next month and as a release candidate by October. However, Beltzner cautioned that both the new features and milestone dates for Firefox 4 are fluid and likely to change.

"As with past releases, we use dates to set targets for milestones, and then we work together to track to those targets," Beltzner wrote in a blog. "We always judge each milestone release against our basic criteria of quality, performance and usability, and we only ship when it's ready."

A major new browser release is no guarantee that Firefox will be able to return to the market growth it enjoyed until Google Chrome started picking up steam. If past results are any indication, the release of Firefox 4 will likely be market-share neutral, according to Net Applications Vice President Vince Vizzaccaro.

"I just did a quick review of Firefox major release dates, and the browser usage market share before and after those release dates," Vizzaccaro said. "There appears to be no correlation between Firefox major releases and changes in usage market share."

Microsoft Launches New Office, Duels Google Online

Microsoft Corp launched an updated version of its Office software on Wednesday, aiming to keep its grip on the hugely profitable business application market while countering the challenge of free online alternatives from Google Inc.

The world's largest software company is upgrading its popular Word, Excel, Outlook and PowerPoint applications and rolling out its own online versions to keep up with the new class of mobile, Web-connected users that has emerged since the last upgrade in 2006.

Microsoft announced several improvements on Wednesday, such as editing photos in Word, using video in PowerPoint, collaborating on documents

and connecting email contacts to Facebook information.

But the biggest change is Microsoft's move into the "cloud" - allowing users to manipulate documents stored on remote servers from anywhere - where Google has been setting the pace.

Corporate buyers of Office will have immediate access to Microsoft Office Web Apps - online versions of Word, PowerPoint and Excel programs for Internet-connected phones and PCs - but will pay more to use them.

Ordinary consumers will be able to use online versions free from next month through Microsoft's Windows Live service, which the company is hoping will entice customers to pay for the full software, which will cost between \$100 and \$500, depending on the level of features.

The online strategy marks a major shift for the Windows franchise - with 500 million users according to Microsoft - which has so far relied on software installed on PCs.

It brings Microsoft into direct competition with Google Docs, stripped-down alternatives to Microsoft's core programs, which are available over the Internet with no need to download software. They are free for personal users and \$50-per-user per year for companies. Google says it has picked up 25 million users since launching Docs almost four years ago.

Some analysts worry that the cost of offering online versions will put a dent in the profit of one of Microsoft's two great profit engines.

Margins will fall, but overall revenue and profit will rise as Microsoft grabs a bigger slice of companies' tech budget, said Stephen Elop, head of Microsoft's Business Division, in an interview at an Office launch event in New York.

"Margins are lower as a percentage of revenue because we are purchasing hardware and providing services that involve people," said Elop. "But most importantly, the absolute profit is expected to go up as a result of cloud computing."

Microsoft's business division, which gets 90 percent of its sales from Office, averages around \$2.8 billion profit per quarter. That is 47 percent of Microsoft's total profit so far this fiscal year, second only to Microsoft's core Windows operating system franchise.

Elop said he hopes customer adoption for Office 2010 will be the quickest ever, as companies start to replace aging machines this year and may decide to upgrade to the new Windows 7 system and Office 2010 at the same time. He said 8.6 million people are already using Office 2010 in test versions.

According to the latest data from tech research firm Forrester, 81 percent of companies are running Office 2007, compared with only 4 percent using Google's online equivalent.

A Forrester poll indicates almost a third of existing Office users plan to upgrade to Office 2010 within 12 months.

Facebook Rolling Out New Security Features

Facebook's millions of users are a lucrative target for Internet criminals looking to steal passwords and more. To combat malicious attacks, phishing scams and spam, the online social network is rolling out new security features.

You can ask to be notified by e-mail or text message when your account is accessed from a computer or mobile device you haven't used before. The log-in attempt may be legitimate when you're traveling, but if you haven't left home in a week, you probably ought to change your password.

Facebook is also adding roadblocks when it notices unusual activity, such as simultaneous log-ins from opposite sides of the planet. For example, you might be shown a photo with your friends tagged, and be asked to correctly identify who they are before the second log-in goes through.

Users will also be able to check where the latest log-ins have come from. This is similar to a feature Google Inc. offers on its Gmail service, where users can view the date, time and location of the most recent log-ins to their account. Gmail also states whether the account is open on another computer at the same time.

Some of these changes are already available, while others are still being tested and will launch over the next few weeks. Facebook typically rolls out changes over several days, if not weeks, so not all users will see them at the same time.

The new features come as Facebook faces growing criticism over the way it handles users' privacy. It has been pushing them to share more about themselves with one another and with the outside world. The security upgrade is a sign the company is working to keep its users' trust in the way it handles the private data they post, even as it fends off complaints from privacy advocates, users and politicians.

Hemanshu Nigam, former chief security officer at Facebook rival MySpace, said Facebook has many incentives to be mindful of privacy complaints.

"A little thing like this can turn into a big thing, and could turn into an advertiser saying, 'Well, I can take my dollars elsewhere,'" said Nigam, who now runs online security firm SSP Blue but still consults for MySpace. "The moment a lawsuit or government investigation begins, advertisers get very nervous of that."

Facebook already has automated systems in place that detect when users access the site in a way that "doesn't make sense," said Jake Brill, product manager at Facebook. This can include sending out an avalanche of messages or logging in from different countries at the same time.

The secondary account verification system that Facebook is rolling out makes sure that when people log in from elsewhere, they are authorized to do so. Many websites try to do this by asking people to type words displayed in an image to prove they are human, rather than a computer seeking automated access. But this only helps keep those software robots out, not people, Brill said.

The requirement to enter information that only you would know - such as the identity of your friends - can help stop unauthorized access should

your password somehow become compromised.

To get notified when someone accesses an account from a new computer or device, you have to turn that feature on. To do this, go to "account settings," scroll down to "account security," then click "change." There, you can choose to be notified of log-ins by e-mail or text message.

Facebook is asking users to activate, or "opt-in" to, the security setting, even as it takes an "opt-out" approach with some of its marketing and personalization features. With opt-out, participation is automatic unless the user takes action.

Without giving an exact figure, Facebook says only a tiny percentage of its users have their accounts compromised. But a small percentage of 400 million can still be sizable.

The site's users are a good target for cybercriminals because of the implicit trust people place in Facebook. They are more likely to respond to scams and other messages that appear to come from real friends, but are actually sent by hackers able to game the system.

It's Official: Valve Releasing Steam, Source Engine For Linux!

Valve Corporation has today rolled out their Steam Mac OS X client to the general public and confirmed something we have been reporting for two years: the Steam content delivery platform and Source Engine are coming to Linux. This news is coming days after we discovered proof in Steam's Mac OS X Client of Linux support and subsequently found more Linux references and even the unreleased Steam Linux client. The day has finally come and Linux gamers around the world have a reason to rejoice, as this is the biggest news for the Linux gaming community that sees very few tier-one titles.

Those enthusiasts within the Phoronix community even managed to get the unreleased Steam Linux client running up to a partially drawn UI and other modifications, but now that work can stop as Valve is preparing to officially release the Steam Linux client from where they will start to offer Linux native games available for sale. For all those doubting our reports that Source/Steam would be coming to Linux, you can find confirmation in the UK's Telegraph and other news sites. An announcement from Valve itself is imminent.

Found already within the Steam store are Linux-native games like Unreal Tournament 2004, World of Goo, and titles from id Software such as Enemy Territory: Quake Wars and Doom 3. Now that the Source Engine is officially supported on Linux, some Source-based games will be coming over too. Will we finally see Unreal Tournament 3 surface on Linux too? Only time will tell, but it is something we speculated back in 2008. Postal III is also being released this year atop the Source Engine and it will be offering up a native client. We have confirmed that Valve's latest and popular titles like Half-Life 2, Counter-Strike: Source, and Team Fortress 2 are among the first of the Steam Linux titles, similar to the Mac OS X support. The released Linux client should be available by the end of summer.

Similar to Valve's strategy with Mac OS X, it's expected that they too will be providing Linux game releases on the same day as Windows / Mac OS X for their new titles and that there will be first-rate support across all

platforms. Portal II should mark the first of these efforts.

This is terrific news considering the last major tier-one game release with a native Linux client was Enemy Territory: Quake Wars back in 2007. There was also supposed to be Unreal Tournament 3 for Linux with claims of it still being worked on, but two years later that has yet to see the light of day, except now it could with the release of the Steam middleware. In the past few years there has just been less-known game releases like Shadowgrounds: Survivor via Linux Game Publishing (LGP) and then the community-spawned open-source games like Alien Arena 2009, Nexuiz, and Sauerbraten, but what Valve has just done should prove to forever revolutionize the Linux gaming scene.

Our friends at Unigine Corp though will now face greater competition in the area of developing the best game engine that is supported on Linux. The Unigine developer is quite visually advanced (and at the same time, very demanding on the hardware) while their developers are quite friendly towards Linux, but to this point besides a couple of great OpenGL benchmarks (found in the Phoronix Test Suite), they have yet to really touch any Linux gamers - but that will change once Primal Carnage and other titles are released.

We are so grateful that Valve has finally publicly confirmed via the Telegraph (and another pending announcement is likely) that they are bringing Steam and the Source Engine to Linux as this should provide a huge opportunity for the Linux distributions and other Linux stakeholders to prove their viability against Windows and can begin attracting gamers if successfully leveraged. We have already shown that in terms of OpenGL performance, Ubuntu 10.04 is on par with Windows 7 for ATI/AMD and NVIDIA graphics and that Linux is a faster gaming platform to Mac OS X.

Stay tuned for plenty more coverage. Of the six years that Phoronix has been around providing many exclusive news stories and Linux hardware/software coverage, Valve's move with the Steam Linux client/Source engine will likely prove to be the most significant event and opportunity that the Linux desktop has been provided at least since the time of the initial Linux netbook push, if not since the entire time we've been around. Only time will tell though if Linux vendors and stakeholders will fully capitalize upon the opportunity that has the potential of greatly expanding the Linux desktop user-base.

Four Nerds and a Cry to Arms Against Facebook

A few months back, four geeky college students, living on pizza in a computer lab downtown on Mercer Street, decided to build a social network that wouldn't force people to surrender their privacy to a big business. It would take three or four months to write the code, and they would need a few thousand dollars each to live on.

They gave themselves 39 days to raise \$10,000, using an online site, Kickstarter, that helps creative people find support.

It turned out that just about all they had to do was whisper their plans.

"We were shocked," said one of the four, Dan Grippi, 21. "For some strange reason, everyone just agreed with this whole privacy thing."

They announced their project on April 24. They reached their \$10,000 goal in 12 days, and the money continues to come in: as of Tuesday afternoon, they had raised \$23,676 from 739 backers. "Maybe 2 or 3 percent of the money is from people we know," said Max Salzberg, 22.

Working with Mr. Salzberg and Mr. Grippi are Raphael Sofaer, 19, and Ilya Zhitomirskiy, 20 - "four talented young nerds," Mr. Salzberg says - all of whom met at New York University's Courant Institute. They have called their project Diaspora* and intend to distribute the software free, and to make the code openly available so that other programmers can build on it. As they describe it, the Diaspora* software will let users set up their own personal servers, called seeds, create their own hubs and fully control the information they share. Mr. Sofaer says that centralized networks like Facebook are not necessary. "In our real lives, we talk to each other," he said. "We don't need to hand our messages to a hub. What Facebook gives you as a user isn't all that hard to do. All the little games, the little walls, the little chat, aren't really rare things. The technology already exists."

The terms of the bargain people make with social networks - you swap personal information for convenient access to their sites - have been shifting, with the companies that operate the networks collecting ever more information about their users. That information can be sold to marketers. Some younger people are becoming more cautious about what they post. "When you give up that data, you're giving it up forever," Mr. Salzberg said. "The value they give us is negligible in the scale of what they are doing, and what we are giving up is all of our privacy."

The Diaspora* group was inspired to begin their project after hearing a talk by Eben Moglen, a law professor at Columbia University, who described the centralized social networks as "spying for free," Mr. Salzberg said.

The four students met in a computer room at N.Y.U., and have spent nearly every waking minute there for months. They understand the appeal of social networks.

"Certainly, as nerds, we have nowhere else to go," Mr. Salzberg said. "We're big nerds."

"My social life has definitely collapsed in favor of maintaining a decent GPA and doing this," Mr. Sofaer said.

A teacher and digital media researcher at N.Y.U., Finn Brunton, said that their project - which does not involve giant rounds of venture capital financing before anyone writes a line of code - reflected "a return of the classic geek means of production: pizza and ramen and guys sleeping under the desks because it is something that it is really exciting and challenging."

And the demand for a social network that gives users control is strong, Mr. Brunton said. "Everyone I talk to about this says, 'Oh my God, I've been waiting for someone to do something like that.'"

There have been at least two other attempts at decentralized networks, Mr. Brunton said, but he thought the Diaspora* group had a firmer plan. Its quick success in raising money, he said, showed the discontent over the state of privacy on the social sites. "We will have to see how widely this will be adopted by the non-nerds," Mr. Brunton said. "But I don't know a single person in the geek demographic who is not freaked out" by large social networks and cyber warehouses of information.

The Diaspora* crew has no doubts about the sprawling strengths and attractions of existing social networks, having gotten more than 2,000 followers of 'joindiaspora' on Twitter in just a few weeks.

"So many people think it needs to exist," Mr. Salzberg said. "We're making it because we want to use it."

Internet Running Out of Addresses

The world will soon run out of Internet addresses as the number of devices connected to the Web explodes unless organizations move to a new Internet Protocol version, the head of the body that allocates IP addresses said.

Rod Beckstrom, chief executive of ICANN, said only 8 or 9 percent of ipv4 addresses were left, and companies needed to switch to the new standard of ipv6 as quickly as possible.

"We are running out," he told Reuters in an interview. "That move really needs to be made, we're seeing this scarce resource run down."

Ipv4, used ever since the Internet became public in the 1980s, was created with space for only a few billion addresses, whereas ipv6 has trillions.

A multitude of gadgets including cameras, music players and video-game consoles are joining computers and mobile phones in being connected to the Web, and each needs its own IP address.

Hans Vestberg, the chief executive of telecoms equipment maker Ericsson, predicted earlier this year there would be 50 billion connected devices by 2020.

Beckstrom said: "It's a big management task and network operations task... but it's going to have to happen because we humans are inventing so many devices that use the Internet now."

Beckstrom was in Moscow to officially hand over the first international domain name in the Cyrillic alphabet to Russia. Instead of having to use the Latin domain .ru, Russian organizations will now be able to use the Cyrillic equivalent.

ICANN approved the gradual introduction of internationalized domain names last year. Nations can now apply for country-level domain names in other scripts, such as Arabic or Chinese, but eventually this will be expanded to all Internet address names.

So far, as well Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have won ICANN approval to use their national language scripts on the top-level domain, or last part of the address after the dot.

"It's a very big move. The Internet's been around roughly for four decades and this is the first time that domain names are opening up to people's native tongues and scripts," Beckstrom said.

He said ICANN had received about 21 requests so far for international

domain names (IDNs) from countries.

Beckstrom said it had taken 11 years of technical work to find a way to bring in other languages.

"When the Internet was invented and when the standards were initially developed they wanted to have it available for all scripts but there wasn't a standard back then so they used ASCII or Latin characters as a standard," he said.

ASCII is an encoding scheme that translates letters of the Latin alphabet, numbers and other symbols into the 1s and 0s that computers can understand.

"The Internet's been accessible to a lot of young people who are comfortable learning new languages or other characters but there are many people who aren't that comfortable working in other languages and character sets," said Beckstrom.

"We see it really opening up to all of the world and actually the Internet becoming more truly global."

10 Most Easily Stolen Passwords

Are any of your users choosing these common password combinations?

A recent study by data security firm Imperva looked at 32 million exposed passwords and revealed the 10 most common:

1. 123456
2. 12345
3. 123456789
4. Password
5. iloveyou
6. princess
7. rockyou
8. 1234567
9. 12345678
10. abc123

Many other stolen passwords used common slang words, adjacent keyboard keys and names presumably important to the user (such as family members).

Warn the folks in your company to avoid those common password practices. It may be common sense to IT pros, but as the report shows, many users fail to understand the importance of choosing complex passwords.

Which State Has The Fastest Broadband?

Not all Internet access is created equal. What part of the country has the best connections?

That would be the Northeast, according to CDN vendor Akamai's latest State of the Internet report. Of the ten states with Internet connections

averaging 5Mbps or higher, six are located in that region: Vermont (5.8Mbps), Massachusetts (5.7Mbps), New Hampshire (5.6Mbps), Rhode Island (5.4Mbps), New York (5.4Mbps) and Connecticut (5.4Mbps).

But which state has the highest overall average? That would be Delaware, with 7.6Mbps.

Overall, though, the U.S. s Internet speeds lag behind much of the globe, with its 3.8Mbps average placing it 22nd on the list.

Judge Nixes Facebook Groups by Class-Cutting Kids

A judge in Argentina has ordered Facebook to close all groups set up by minors, after thousands of middle-schoolers used the social media website to organize an unauthorized day off school, according to a court source.

A ruling by judge Alfredo Dantiacq Sanchez in the western province of Mendoza ordered "the immediate closure of groups created or to be created by minors" which "promote truancy without the permission of their parents or the school system."

About 11,000 middle school students heeded a call posted on Facebook to cut classes and get together in a town square.

The event was so popular it spawned copycat class-cutters also using Facebook to launch their own events.

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